DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 026 891 FL 000 985

By-Fleming, Gerald

Comic Cassettes for Language Classes.

Pub Date Jan 68
Note-3p.; Film User, Jan 1968
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.25
Descriptors-*Audiovisual Aids, *Cartoons, Filmstrips, Foreign Language Films, Illustrations, Instructional Films, Instructional Materials, Language Aids, *Language Instruction, Modern Languages, *Motivation Techniques, *Pictorial Stimuli, Second Language Learning, Teaching Techniques

The development of animated cartoon sequences showing various kinds of mime and gesture in humorous situations is recommended as a useful teaching aid in language learning. Humor as a significant element in the content of pictorial aids is stressed, and the appropriate types of humor are identified and illustrated. Some remarks are made about the use of word and picture in education with reference to the theories of Pestalozzi and Komenski. For a related document see FL 000 029. (AF)

ED 028971

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Reprinted from Film User, *January 1968*

COMIC CASSETTES FOR LANGUAGE CLASSES

Humour is a vital ingredient in communication, says Gerald Fleming, L-ès-L (Lille), F.I.L.

NOBODY TODAY would doubt that the effect of visual impact on the senses has a profound influence over our capacity to interpret our conscious world. Nor can there be any doubt about the urgent need for ever more effective, functional and dynamic new modern-language teaching tools, which in their *still* visual form should present significant fleeting moments of the target language sign-culture, enabling the teaching of "bits of language" without recourse to the mother tongue.

Equally, we must make every effort to create new *animated* visual materials, providing for teacher and students recreated incidents observed in life (with the possible addition of reasonably sophisticated elements of fantasy established in terms of physical reality). Such incidents must be dynamic and psychologically provocative in both form and content, didactically organised to enable progression and development in truly meaningful oral composition.

Such oral composition, flowing from short animated cartoon sequences, should progress from guided narration to orientated extrapolations and, finally, the pictured incidents should be springboards for free cohesive expression in the foreign language.

Four years ago, at the international scientific and pedagogic film festival in Budapest, I noted down in my diary a remark made to me by a headmaster of a school I visited on that occasion.

"From the days of scholasticism to the present time, the word of the teacher has claimed an unjustifiably privileged position. Picture and word have lived in watertight compartments within the school. One was usually used to the exclusion of the other and the basic conflict, as far as school is concerned, lay (and often still lies) in the fact that . . . the child belongs to both worlds. The spoken and printed word and the picture are equally tied to reality. It is reality that evokes speech. As a consequence, we should not use any of these refinements and symbols to the exclusion of the other."

In October 1956, Prof. Meredith of Leeds University wrote: "The serious study of the visual element of the child's mental life and of its educational importance has . . . scarcely yet begun".

Then, 180 years ago, Pestalozzi said: "Observing is the foundation of learning". By "observing", Pestalozzi meant of course a grasping of evident associations and relationships by means of clear ideas.

Even 130 years before Pestalozzi, Jan Komenski (that great Bohemian theologian, educator and researcher) wrote in his "Orbis Pictus": "Let the depicted realities be frequently examined by the scholars, so that they may see nothing that they cannot name, and that they may name nothing that they cannot identify in its reality". He was the first true researcher into text-picture relationships in language-teaching media.

Yet even 40 years before Komenski, Bacon had already stated (and the remark has relevance to the growing array of educational hardware which is now at teachers' disposal): "Brains and hands alone do not suffice . . . instrumentis et auxilibus res perficitur . . . we need [the right kind of] teaching tools . . . for optimal results with our students".

And it seems peculiarly significant to me that a week after my return from a Unesco seminar in Prague, where I had the opportunity to study the latest remarkable animation techniques, in which mime and gestures have been perfected to an astonishing degree, I also came across evidence of Leonardo da Vinci's particular interest in the mimic behaviour of man—"the movements and positions of the figures should show the exact frame of mind of each, and in such a way that they can mean nothing else".

I have given this brief historical *tour d'horizon* to show that we are building on very solid foundations. It is no accident that great scholars and artists have been fascinated again and again by the relation between visual experience and communication. Where Leonardo, Komenski, Pestalozzi and others have left off, and have shown us the way to allying the aesthetic to the rigorously didactic, we must continue to work and create—in order to ensure that our increasingly precocious (not meant pejoratively here) learners in schools shall, through being exposed to legitimately provocative visual media, be guided inescapably towards a high degree of acuity of perception, observation and analysis (i.e., interpretation) of the content of such visual modern-language teaching media. Such should be the degree of this perception that it will make

FL 000 985

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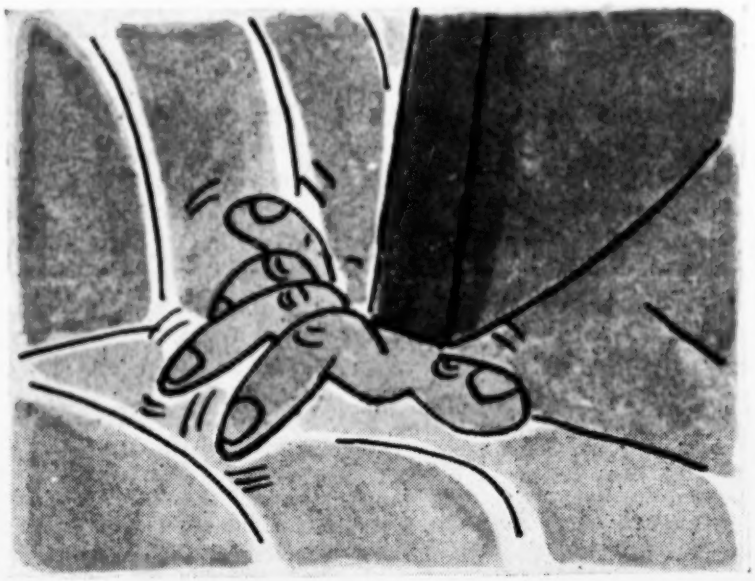
Development of a comic situation: from the Halas & Batchelor/Macmillan *Monsieur Carré* series

Le taxi doit s'arrêter

Regardez notre pauvre homme—il devient impatient



Il devient très impatient

Le feu est au vert; le taxi démarre de nouveau

Monsieur Carré est content

Mais, qu'est-ce qu'il y a?

a not insignificant contribution towards sharpening the learner's analytical faculties, deepening the appreciation of texts in the foreign language and, in final analysis, creating a deeper awareness of what makes the people whose language is being learned "tick".

Our modern audio-visual language courses and the new 8mm foreign language teaching films are, all of them, the result of the postulate that the picture can represent an element of reality more basic and more potent than language, and that the doubly powerful impact on the learning processes by live or recorded foreign-language speech patterns, allied (in the earlier stages) to their exact visual counterpart, will rapidly consolidate speech fluency in the target language.

In other words, the response-evoking potency and potential of the right kind of pictorial teaching materials is very considerable indeed. We are aiming at what Piaget calls the productive form of teaching—the creation of situations which will evoke spontaneous elaboration on the part of the learner.

What are the implications of the most recent developments in language-teaching aids? If it is agreed that the visual memory is able to make a marked contribution to the process of language learning by tying pictorial sequences of increasing psychological significance to oral and written commentary, thus bringing into play all memory components; and if it is agreed that, in the short animated language-teaching film, the economy and elegance of line, the simplicity of shape, the form, treatment, style, use of colour, timing and clarity all act as a powerful stimulus to the total retentive powers of the learner; and if it is agreed finally that mellow humour should be a significant element of the content of such aids: then we must appreciate that the creation of optimally functional short 8mm animated cartoon films for the modern-language class is no easy task.

I have stressed the use of mellow humour, for I subscribe to Knox's dictum that satire (visual or textual) provokes laughter that has malice in it always. The humorist, says Knox, runs with the hare while the satirist hunts with the hounds.

Cruelty has no place in such materials. The comic situation is only genuinely funny if the victim is the victim of his own credulity, or greed, or lack of observation, or lack of caution. If the mechanism of the comic element is such that the victim cannot possibly avoid the calamity prepared for him, then this is simple cruelty.

It is worth recording here the growing importance of the appreciative function of humour, and the increase in the means taken to disguise its corrective function. The humour of mere situation is far less common nowadays, and the humour of character has steadily increased. This growing stress on character has naturally led to a wider outlook in general and, through the greater attention paid to the ridiculousness of behaviour common to all of us, to a greater general tolerance of human weaknesses.

Positive relationship

There is a growing awareness of humour as a constructive and not destructive force, of humour as a welder together rather than a divider of sheep from goats, and of the sense of humour as the great enemy of the sense of superiority, and not, as has occasionally been held, as its inseparable companion and bosom friend. In the classroom the appreciative (and corrective) function of humour, and the *rire de bon coeur* engendered by it, must be considered as a profoundly civilising factor, making for a more positive relationship between the teacher and his captive audience and contributing clearly towards the humanising of the image of the pedagogue.

If, in one of our 8mm loops, we show M. Carré racing to his office in a taxi because he is late, and drumming in visible impatience with his fingers on the seat, with a relevant mimic repertoire tied to this gesture, enabling the meaningful teaching of "devenir de plus en plus impatient", then the resultant chuckle or smile of recognition in the group of learners will be an immediate act of common appreciation, making not only for more efficient and meaningful learning but also for increased confidence on the part of the learners (receivers of the message) in their powers of aesthetic appreciation!

Corporate appreciation

We are not here dealing with humour as a British "status symbol of intellect". The students are not likely to "laugh in the wrong places" and betray themselves utterly, their I.Q., background and "niche in the social system". Their *corporate* act of appreciation and acknowledgement of what is both funny and meaningful will, in itself, be a powerful motivational force—as we have been able to observe on very many occasions.

The creators (methodologist and film maker working in close collaboration) of these new media should set out from the fact that we rarely perceive the familiar. We do not shrink from it; we merely take it for granted, become impervious to it, unable to remain detached observers. Intimate faces, the streets we walk day by day, the places we work in, the homes we live in—all these are part of us, like our skin. Equally, we often become "blind" to much that is comic in human behaviour unless we are orientated towards detached observation. Hence, the cartoon form was chosen for the several 8mm modern language-teaching projects now available.

Provided the degree of distortion and exaggeration in form and content is "mellow", we may say with complete confidence that this mode commends particular attention. Our situations are to appeal to the learner in such a way that their linguistic exploitation should, where acceptable and relevant, be allied to their smile- and laughter-provoking potency. The *rire de bon coeur* we are hoping for arises out of the organised comic elements of situation, character and words. This laughter of "non-involvement" is an activity of intelligence—the emotions are not involved, as they often are when we are watching a television story. The recreated, simplified (lines of) "animated cartoon reality" contributes towards this act of detached awareness, comprehension and appreciation, while photographed reality is nearly always non-simplified and achieves the effect of involvement vis à vis its receivers/viewers. What we require in the foreign language class is student activity resulting in meaningful, progressively sharpened response of an increasingly abstract nature. There is no doubt in my mind that limited animated cartoon sequences (quite possibly in black-and-white) showing a carefully timed and programmed wealth of mime and gesture only, involving preferably two people and bringing the affective (emotive) aspects of the visually depicted humans into relief, could greatly assist in the teaching of the abstractions of speech, which are closely linked to our emotions. We must create new inexpensive visual language-teaching media of the animated cartoon type, in which we can effectively harness, at differing levels of sophistication, the phenomena of detachment to linguistically creative observation, through the motivating force and aesthetic appeal of visual humour.□

Mr. Fleming is Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at the University of Surrey. This article is based on a paper which he recently delivered at a seminar in Cambridge.